

Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents:



Impacting Lives through Engaging Adults
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Impacting Lives...



**Children of Incarcerated Parents
or Just Children?**

Just Children: Factors Influencing Coping

- Development
- Temperament
- Family Dynamics and Coping Styles
- Trauma
- Details of the Incarceration
- Available Supports



Children of Incarcerated Parents

- Children of incarcerated parents mourn the loss of their incarcerated parent .
- The extended absence/loss of a parent to incarceration is usually exacerbated by poverty, poor early care /educational environments, violent neighborhoods and racism.

Children of Incarcerated Parents

Feelings of loss, hurt and anger
are usually accompanied by :

- Stigma
- A “conspiracy of silence”
- Loyalty conflicts



Engaging Adults: Mentors as Protective Factors

- Predictable and attached relationships
- Skills, competence and confidence
- Community, Faith, Meaning and Beliefs

Engaging Adults: Mentoring Philosophies

❖ Diversion

Vs.

❖ Alternative Role Model

Vs.

❖ Supplemental Attachment

Vs.

❖ Skills Coaching



Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents:

➤ First Do No Harm:

Premature termination of mentoring relationships, mentoring relationships that increase the stigma and shame, perpetuate the conspiracy of silence or intensify the loyalty conflicts can *potentially do harm.*

Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents: Guiding Principles

- I. Mentoring Relationships are the tool of change: longevity is key.
- II. Children mourn the loss of the incarcerated parent: We must honor the significance of the prisoner to the child.
- III. Caregivers are the gatekeepers of the mentoring relationships: Programs can strive to minimize loyalty conflicts for the child and alienation for the caregivers through policies and practice.
- IV. Agencies provide the scaffolding that supports mentoring relationships: training and on going supervision is essential.

Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents: Guiding Principles

**Relationships are the tool of change:
longevity is key.**

- Trust is necessary for longevity
- Assumptions, beliefs and attitudes can interfere with trust
- Race and class influence relationships

Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents: Guiding Principles

We must honor the significance of the incarcerated parent

Children of Incarcerated Parents mourn the loss of their incarcerated parent. The one that cared for them ,the one that could have or the one that will come back “better”

Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents: Guiding Principles

Caregivers are the gatekeepers of the mentoring relationships

In the Amachi Program in Philadelphia, 62% of the relationships between mentors and children of Incarcerated Parents lasted over 12 months. Of the 38% that ended in less than a year, 24% terminated because the caregiver did not want the relationship to continue. (Jucovy, 2003)

Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents: Guiding Principles

*Agencies provide the scaffolding that
supports mentoring relationships:*

Training and on going supervision

Making matches that work

Monitoring matches

Nurturing reflective supervision

Tracking and recording problems

Engaging Mentors: Why do people mentor?



- There is very little written about the motives of and benefits to mentors.
- The reflections of mentors include an array of reasons that they became mentors.
- The reasons matter and effect the match

Why do people mentor?

- Some feel the need to give back to the community, as apart of a family or cultural expectation.
- Others miss their children who have left the nest.
- Mentors may be motivated to “save” children.

Why do people mentor?

- Some need to “recreate the drama” of their own youth.
- Many feel that they have experiences and skills that could help a child.
- Mentors often report feeling good about passing on wisdom and ideas.

Why do people mentor?

- Mentoring can increase the self-confidence of mentors
- Mentors gain insights into their own lives and relationships.
- A few people enjoy public recognition that can come with the job.

Why do people mentor?

Most report feeling quietly fulfilled, enjoying the relationship, and perhaps viewing mentoring as part of a mission or mitzvah.
(Armstrong, 2000; Schultz, 1995; Rhodes, 2002)



Why do people mentor?

- Some mentors for children of Incarcerated Parents are recruited by organizations, pastors or youth leaders.
- They may be asked to mentor because of their experiences working with youth
- They may be the child of a prisoner
- They may just be “a loving grandparent or good parent.”(Jucovey, 2003)

Recruiting and Matching for Longevity

- To recruit mentors who are committed to the concept of mentoring children of Incarcerated Parents
- To provide orientation on the goals and structure of the program
- To train mentors well, giving them realistic expectations and skills for building trust

Recruiting and Matching for Longevity

- To provide ongoing case management and support for the mentors, mentees and the match relationship
- To include policies and practices that support the staff to do all of the above

Engaging Caregivers

- The way in which caregivers are coping with the pressures created by parental incarceration will have a profound effect on the child's ability to cope.
- The way in which the agency engages caregivers will influence their ability to support the child and the match.

(Adalist-Estrin, 2004)

Meeting Needs...Possibilities and Limitations

I'll be gone out of town for a month,

would you water my plants???

Factors Affecting Family Coping

- Community support vs. isolation: urban, suburban or rural.
- Economic stability.
- Health and emotional capacity of caregivers.
- Quality of the child's school.
- Job satisfaction.
- Community resources.
- Child and family spirituality.
- Racial and ethnic prejudices.

Engaging Caregivers: Family Coping Styles

- ❖ The Family on Hold
- ❖ The Parallel Family
- ❖ The Estranged Family
- ❖ The Turbulent Family
- ❖ The Functioning Family

Engaging Caregivers

- Create an atmosphere of safety and trust
- Check your assumptions ,beliefs ,judgments and attitudes
- Approach families as allies not adversaries
- Collaborate with caregivers –ask for input, guidance and feedback
- Provide information and support

Engaging Incarcerated Parents: Considerations

- Caregivers wishes
- Parent – child relationship
- Source of child referral
- Awareness of child
- Circumstances of the crime
- Logistics of Incarceration
- Honoring the significance of the parent to the child



Engaging Incarcerated Parents: Possibilities

- Intake information/perspectives and preferences
- Introduction letter from child/mentor
- Update letters /newsletters from agency
- Book clubs
- Games and activities: hangman, draw-ons, add on stories
- Release guidelines

Engaging Staff

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Engaging Staff: The ARCH

Attitudes-The meaning that is made of incarceration and the perspectives and biases of staff can create obstacles to supportive policies,programs and practices.

StATEGY: Reflective supervision-modeling from the top down

Engaging Staff: The ARCH

Relevance- Policies and practices must be based on accurate information and relevance to families of the incarcerated including a focus on the role of race and ethnicity in the lives of children of prisoners.

Strategy: Mentors for staff - formerly incarcerated parents or caregivers of children of incarcerated parents.

Engaging Staff: The ARCH

Complexity – The family circumstances and lives of children of incarcerated parents are complex and varied. Resist the temptation to provide template/ one size fits all services.

Standardization - Provide a matrix of responding to issues that may arise.

U R U N T O

Urgency – If urgent what is the chain of command for getting help? And who calls whom? 24 hours?

Refer - Is this a referral situation? What is agency protocol for referrals?

Understand more- Do you need more information? Where can you get it?

Note it - What is important to note in the file? Does the record need a signature?

U R U N T O

Talk about it –Can you get supervision? Are there rules about peer support and confidentiality?

Observe - Is this a situation that does not warrant emergency response, or referral or even a formal file notation but it would be good for staff to note the incident for future observation, “to keep an eye on”

Engaging Staff: The ARCHH

Healing – Programs, practices and policies must focus on healing the wounds created by incarceration without re-traumatizing the children or families and burning out staff.

Strategy: Combat compassion fatigue-Early dismissals, free neck and shoulder massages, careful caseloads, staff appreciation events, “affirmations”, built in boundaries

Impacting Lives by Engaging Adults

“Everything you touch ,

you change.

Everything you change,

changes you.”

Octavia Butler, Parable of the Talents

Resources

- Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents
FCN Report Issue #39
- Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents and
Match Support Training Curriculum
- Children of Incarcerated Parents Library

Family and Corrections Network
fcnetwork.org

The Federal Resource Center for Children of Incarcerated
Parents continues
at
Family and Corrections Network
with a new name

*The National Resource Center on
Children and Families of the
Incarcerated*

beginning on September 15, 2006

